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RECORD REVIEW

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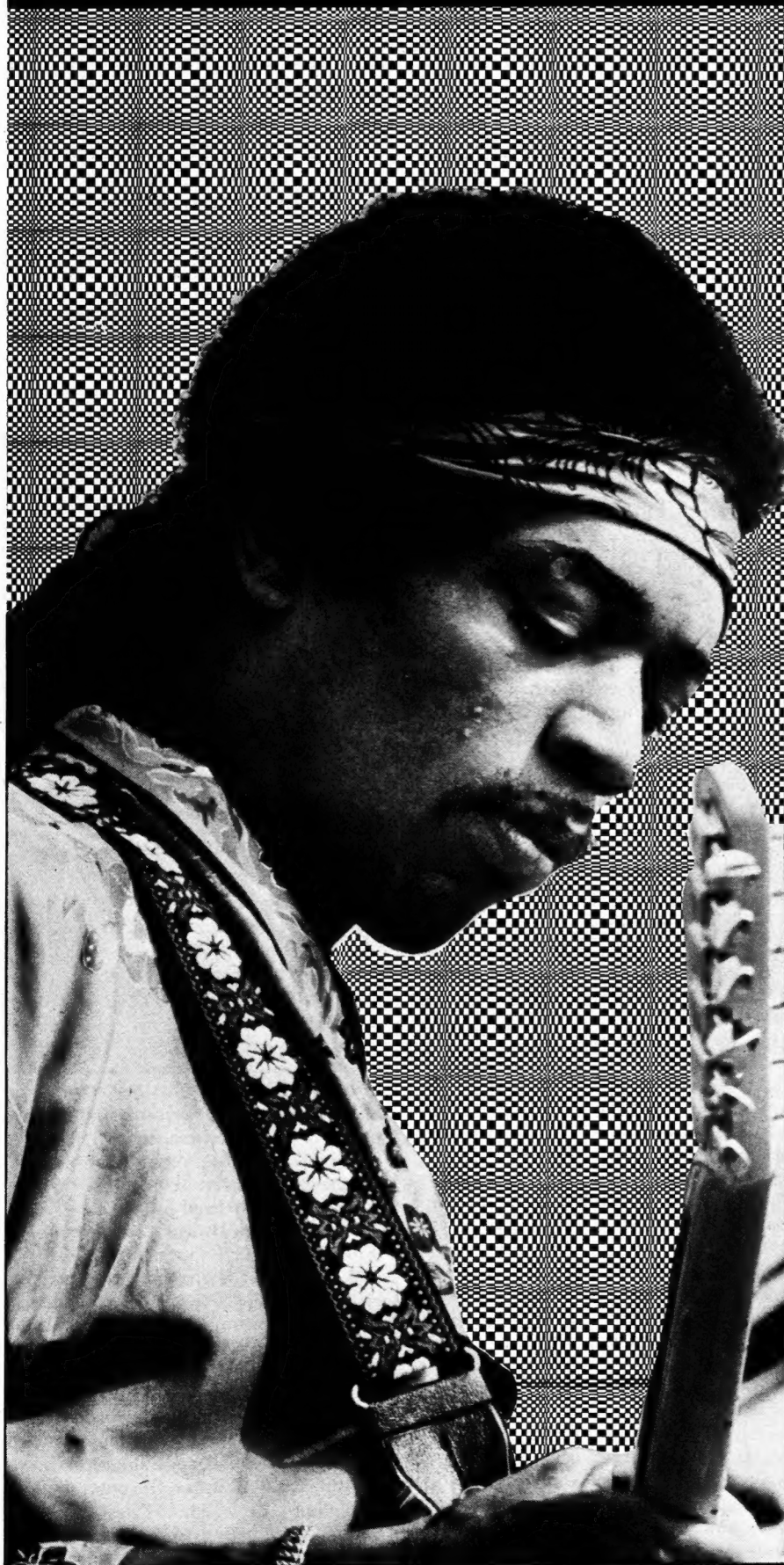
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Jimi Hendrix In Retrospect

by Steven Rosen



He has been called the most influential guitarist of the 60's and there are probably very few who would argue the statement. He brought to rock a sense of electricity and dimension which groups like The Who and Cream had just started experimenting with. And beyond the music was the man—an electric gypsy who dressed in wonderfully bright colors and whose live shows included burning guitars, broken guitars, and a sense of hysteria few performers are able to achieve.

This narrative on James Marshall Hendrix, nee Jimi Hendrix, is but a brief glimpse into the recorded history of his life. All of his American releases will be discussed at some length as will some posthumous recordings which seem to be of merit. The rest of the holes can be filled in by simply listening to the man's music.

Born in Seattle, Washington, November 27, 1942, he was the son of a landscape gardener. He left Garfield High School at age 16 to help his dad but ten years earlier he had already expressed an interest in music when he made believe a broom was a guitar. When Jimi was 11 his dad bought him a cheap acoustic and a year later he received his first electric.

He joined the Army in 1963 and for 14 months was a parachutist in the 101st Airborne. After the Army he played in a series of bands all the way from Los Angeles to Nashville, working with people like Little Richard, The Isley Brothers, and Wilson Pickett. He was also involved in several tours where he backed up performers like B.B. King, Sam Cooke, Solomon Burke, Chuck Jackson, and Jackie Wilson.

Hendrix had an opportunity to go to England and it was here that he really made his presence felt. On December 16, 1966, he released his first single, a remake of "Hey Joe". "Purple Haze" was his second single released on March 18, 1967, followed by "The Wind Cries Mary" released on May 13 and "Burning of the Midnight Lamp" released on September 16.

Are You Experienced was released on May 19, 1967, and to this day stands as the yardmark of all of Hendrix's recorded work and is one of the most classically influential pieces of modern rock.

Immediately one realizes the importance of drummer Mitch Mitchell whose jazz technique and finesse makes for an outstanding counterpart to Hendrix's guitar work. On such cuts as "Fire" and "Manic Depression", Mitchell whizzes around his kit and is responsible for making these particular cuts so dramatic.

On "The Wind Cries Mary" the listener is treated to that special Hendrix technique where the music seems to flow out of the guitar and is highlighted on later tracks like "Little Wing".

"Purple Haze" has now become Jimi's anthem and in fact has probably been played by more fledgling rock bands than any other song ever recorded. It was a

biting antics which had brought him his name and consequently he took time off and went back into the studio and recorded *Electric Ladyland*.

While *Are You Experienced* still stands as his *piece de resistance* in terms of songwriting and guitaranship, *Electric Ladyland* represents perhaps the most imaginative use of studio techniques ever heard on record. The LP opens with "And The Gods Made Love", an electronic puzzle of tape loops and echo. About it Hendrix once said, "We knew this was the track that most people will jump on to criticize, so I put it first to get it over with."

Perhaps it was because the guitarist produced and directed the album himself (earlier releases were engineered by Eddie Kramer and produced by Chas Chandler) that the sound of the guitar is so vivid and the sound of the drums so full. In fact during the cutting of the album Chas Chandler felt a growing pressure and bowed out to leave the entire operation to Hendrix.

The music on the album is far looser than before; extended jams cover much of the two-record set and include "friends and passengers" like Mike Finnigan and Buddy Miles ("Rainy Day, Dream Away" and "Still Raining, Still Dreaming"); Stevie Winwood and Jack Cassidy ("Voodoo Child"); Al Kooper ("Long Hot Summer Night"); and Chris Wood ("1963...A Merman I Should Turn To Be").

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"Voodoo Chile" is a spine tingling jam and it is almost impossible to believe a track of such power could ever be performed in a studio and not on a stage.

Noel Redding comes of age as a writer with his chirping "Little Miss Strange" opening Side B. Earl King's "Come On" later on this side is a strong display of Hendrix's blues roots. "Gypsy Eyes" and "Burning of the Midnight Lamp" end this side, both cuts strong Hendrix compositions.

Side C is the ocean side; "Rainy Day, Dream Away" starts with a cough and a sniff (of what?) and in this Jimi's guitar talks as it has never done before.

Side D is notable for his cover of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower". The solos between each verse are as concise and lyrical as any he's ever played and relate in the same way as Jimmy Page's playing on



"Stairway to Heaven" does. In other words each note is of supreme value in both the Zeppelin and Experience tunes. Certainly both guitarists have played flashier but never before has either one so perfectly captured the essence of a pure guitar solo.

In November of 1968, the Experience officially split. In February of the following year he played two concerts at London's Albert Hall before a whole new age-group of fans. In the summer of 1969 he performed at the now legendary Woodstock Festival but for the greater part of that year he remained in self-imposed exile in New York. In 1970 he unveiled the Band of Gypsies which featured Billy Cox on bass and Buddy Miles on drums.

Band of Gypsies was the sole recording with this lineup and was the album Hendrix owed to Capitol for releasing him to Reprise. It was recorded live at the Fillmore East in New York on New Year's Eve 1969/70. Both sides are basically jams centered around a basic verse/chorus scheme and while Hendrix himself felt this album should have never been released it does have its moments. "Machine Gun" is riveting and his playing on "Power of Soul" is truly exciting. Buddy Miles' "Changes" is included here and fares far better than his original version. Bassist

Billy Cox is a perfect section musician and when Miles leaves his mouth shut and is not trying to sing in every empty space he too provides a strong backing for the guitar.

The Cry of Love was his next studio effort. He had been experimenting in the studio and playing around on a casual basis and the sound and direction he developed on this album seems to indicate what we might call the second coming. The songs are all uniquely Hendrix but they seem somehow more orchestrated, more concise, more personal. It is the first posthumously released album and was released just a few days after his appearance at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970.

"Freedom" opens the record at a 100 m.p.h. pace. Mitch Mitchell is flawless here and on the next track titled "Drifting" Hendrix shifts down to second for one of those lilting pieces he was so well known for.

"Angel" from Side 2 is Hendrix at his astral best. It floats and dives and cruises and in terms of pure composition is one of the most memorable he ever wrote.

Following *The Cry of Love* album was another live recording taken from his performance at the Monterey Pop Festival. Recorded at the festival on three

consecutive days in June of 1967, it features but four tunes—"Like A Rolling Stone", "Rock Me, Baby", "Can You See Me", and "Wild Thing". Only "Can You See Me" is a Hendrix original and while all four cuts are ragged they manage to capture some of the fire and output which must have existed during that performance.

Rainbow Bridge seems to take up where *The Cry of Love* left off. Used as the soundtrack for a movie of the same name, the album includes live as well as studio cuts which were recorded up to three years before the release of the album.

The album opener is "Dolly Dagger" which is known to have been the next single before his death (it has subsequently been issued as a 45). The guitar line in this tune is like a buzzsaw; like the vocal line, "She drinks her blood from the jagged edge", so does the guitar cut through the track as Hendrix weaves a poly-rhythm with voice and instrument.

On "Earth Blues" The Ronettes sing a descending chorus of "Love, love, love", and this track is one which featured a style of music Hendrix referred to as Electric Church and is a region he wanted to more fully explore.

"Pali Gap" features percussionist Juma Edwards and reflects some of the jazz elements the guitarist was experimenting



with while hibernating in New York.

"Room Full Of Mirrors" was written around the time of his bust in Toronto and has Billy Cox on bass and Buddy Miles on drums as do most of the tracks.

"Star Spangled Banner" is here recorded for the first time and absent is the rage and satire which would mark later versions of the song. It's quite impossible to hear how many tracks of guitars are present because with each listening another one may yet be detected.

Side Two opens with the notable "Look Over Yonder" because it utilizes the original Experience lineup of Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding on drums and bass respectively.

"Hear My Train A Comin' " was recorded live in Berkeley and was a song he used regularly in his last series of concerts.

The closing track is "Hey Baby" and explores a series of musical ideas Hendrix was toying with at the time. The riff is simple but with the different variations Hendrix toyed with one can only imagine the types of arrangements he might have produced.

This album is diverse but not a hodge-podge; it seems to take the strains of *The Cry of Love* yet one step further. On *Rainbow Bridge* the ideas have flesh and bones while on *Love* they are still in a skeletal state.

After *Rainbow Bridge* came a succession of albums including *Experience*; *Isle of Wight*; *Hendrix In The West*; *War Heroes*; *Soundtrack From Jimi Hendrix*; and *Loose Ends*.

The *Soundtrack* album is illuminating in that it includes not only live cuts but a handful of interviews with such luminaries as Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, and Pete Townshend.

More recent recordings cover such titles as (not necessarily in release order) *Crash Landing*; *Midnight Lightning*; *The Essential Jimi Hendrix Volumes One and Two*; and *Jimi Hendrix: Medley*.

Most of these recent releases were produced by Alan Douglas, a professional who had worked with such names as Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, John McLaughlin, and Muddy Waters. Hendrix had called Douglas in to produce sessions

for him when he felt he needed a push in a more jazz oriented direction.

Here you have in somewhat condensed version the recorded legacy of one of music's most feted and fated heroes. His songs have withstood the test of time and people like Eric Clapton, Pete Townshend, Les Paul, and Mike Bloomfield still speak of him in awed tones.

The true test of an artist is his ability to grow and maintain a respectable level of creativity and Hendrix had this ability. While no album really matched the intensity and magic of his debut cutting (*Are You Experienced*) there were moments on each album elevating the particular recording to some raised level. The jams on *Electric Ladyland* and even some cuts from the posthumous albums (*War Heroes* and *In the West* contain memorable tracks) rank among his strongest works.

And while we have been bombarded with a slew of albums following his death there is enough valid material available (his first three albums contain everything a Hendrix listener might need) to satisfy





anyone's appetite.

One can only surmise as to what direction Jimi Hendrix might have gone in had he lived. Certainly orchestration would have become far more predominant—perhaps the use of brass and strings. Along these lines instrumental music would have been employed more and more. Your own imagination is the best guide.

Hendrix died on September 18, 1970. His death certificate read: "Inhalation of vomit. Barbiturate intoxication." Suicide? Possibly but not likely. Again the death certificate read: "Insufficient evidence of circumstances. Open verdict."

Hendrix has been gone for almost a decade and still his music and legend live. One can only assume posthumous recordings will be released for some time to come and in essence this will propagate the Hendrix tale. And nothing speaks louder than his music. So instead of trying to imagine where he might be, put one of his albums on the turntable and see where he was. Then—and only then—will we be able to understand more fully what went into making one of music's most creative, durable, and passionate artists.